

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Paulina Naser-Saravia, B.S., and I am a medical student at Frank H. Netter School of Medicine in North Haven, CT. I am also part of the Latino Medical Student Association.

I stand in support of HB 6616: “An Act Concerning Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status”. Expanding access to HUSKY regardless of immigration status is an important step in ensuring our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we need. If Connecticut wants a future that includes healthy families and a stable, thriving and growing workforce that is ready to meet the needs of our future, Connecticut must ensure that these individuals up to age 26 have access to health coverage.

I grew up in Durango, Mexico, and I moved to the United States with a dream shared by many immigrants—pursuit of a better life. I have a bachelor’s degree in Microbiology and an associate’s in Translation studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara. I worked as a medical assistant and medical interpreter for five years before starting medical school at Frank H. Netter M.D School of Medicine. As a translator, I worked to bridge the language gap between patient and doctor. One Spanish-speaking patient suffered significant loss in language skills following a stroke. The patient’s husband confided in us that she was an undocumented immigrant from Mexico. He shyly asked the doctor for an official letter explaining the extent of the stroke sequelae and resulting aphasia. This letter would then be presented to immigration officials in order to excuse her from the oral portion of the permanent residency exam. The doctor agreed. Touched and relieved by the doctor’s willingness to help, the patient began trying to say something, her eyes filling with tears. “Something beautiful”, she said confidently, “I feel something beautiful.” Frustrated but determined, she struggled to find words she knew, but had lost. At last, she turned to me, took a deep breath, and said, “Grateful, I feel grateful.”

It was confusing enough for my family to navigate this immigration process, and I can only imagine how much more difficult and terrifying it is for this patient, with a language barrier and a disability like hers. I think of this patient often—how difficult it was to communicate, how scared they were to admit that she was undocumented, how kind my boss was, and how relieved her and her husband were that I spoke Spanish. I want to keep helping patients like her get better care, feel comfortable, and help others feel something beautiful like she did.

My mission as a future physician is to expand access to proper healthcare, regardless of immigration status, age, language, race, orientation or identity. To that end, I support HB 6616 and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation out of committee in its current form - to expand HUSKY access to age 26. Our work does not end with expanding access up to age 12 nor with expanding access up to age 18. And that work must continue this year by expanding HUSKY access up to age 26. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to all immigrants regardless of age.

Thank you for your time,
Paulina Naser-Saravia